The missionary crisis in China.

by

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THE MISSIONARY CRISIS IN CHINA.

By REV. S. H. CHESTER, D.D.

There are several things concerning China about which the minds of students of present day problems have been agitated which may now be regarded as closed questions. The first of these is the question of China as a military power. At the beginning of the recent troubles the periodicals of the country were full of alarming statements by those who might have been supposed to know whereof they spoke, as to the millions of soldiers that China had been drilling in modern methods since her war with Japan, and the unlimited supply of modern arms, manufactured or imported, with which her arsenals were stored. Many were led to believe that she would not only be able to oppose an effective resistance to any foreign invasion, but that she was in danger of becoming a foreign

NOTE—Address delivered before the Missionary Society of Louisville Seminary.

invader herself, and that the "Yellow Peril" was something which the nations of the West had good cause to fear.

While reading these statements I recalled an interview which I had, in 1897, with Gen. Jones, former Confederate brigadier, then our United States Consul at Chinkiang. He told me of a visit which he had recently paid to Li Hung Chang, at Tientsin. He said that after a gorgeous feast with which he was regaled he was asked by Li Hung Chang to go out and review a body of about twenty thousand troops, which Li Hung Chang was endeavoring to have trained and put upon a modern military basis. When the troops had been put through their maneuvers, his host turned to him and said: "What do you think of my army?" Gen. Jones replied: "I suppose you wish me to tell you the truth?" "Yes," said Li Hung Chang, "let me have your honest opinion." "Well," said Gen. Jones, "your army is not worth ————, *anything at all.*" Li Hung Chang replied, "Well, I know that is true, but it is the best I can do with the material now at my disposal." This was

the body of troops with which the allied forces first came into collision at Tientsin. It seemed for a time as if they might be going to make an effectual resistance. They were able to overwhelm Admiral Seymour's little band of 1,800 marines, and prevent its progress towards Pekin. But just so soon as there was anything that could be called an army representing the Western powers on the field this body of troops, and all the imperial forces, together with the bands of Boxers in the vicinity, seemed to vanish from the scene, and the allied troops marched into Pekin practically without opposition. It is evident, therefore, that whatever settlement is made between the Western powers and China will be one into which the question of China as a military power does not enter. The people of China furnish as fine raw material for soldiers as those of any other nation, but the conditions will have to be greatly changed before their military capacities can be utilized.

Another closed question, it seems to me, is the much talked of partition of

China. Russia desires to dominate, and possibly own, Manchuria, in order to protect her Trans-Siberian Railway and trade which traverses that province. She will take possession of it whenever the other Western powers consent, but she is not ready to go to war, either with Japan or England, for that purpose. Every Western power having trade interests in the far East needs somewhere in that part of the world a naval base for the rendezvous and coaling of its ships. These they already have. Admiral Dewey selected ours for us at Manila. England has hers at Hong-Kong and Wei-Hei-Wei; Germany, at Kaiouchow; Russia, at Port Arthur, and France, at Tonquin. For them the possession of any of China's territory beyond these naval bases would simply be a burden without any compensating advantages. What they all want is the "open door" for trade. This "open door" they want for the whole of China, and not for a small part of it, as would be the case if the Chines Empire were disintegrated and partitioned among them.

The open door means freedom of in-

gress and egress, and security for the life and property of those who are engaged in exploiting the material resources of the country. It means, therefore, at the same time the "open door" for the gospel. This is what the church of Christ asks in regard to China. It asks no aid of consuls and gunboats for the purpose of forcing the Christian religion upon an unwilling people. It only asks the same protection that is accorded the diplomat and the trader for its representatives while they go and tell those who are willing to hear it the story of the gospel. And this is manifestly what Providence has had in view in permitting all the terrible things that have recently come to pass in China. While making the wrath of man to praise Him, and restraining the remainder thereof, He has been answering the prayer of His people for a hundred years for the privilege of preaching the gospel in China. And now in this providential answering of its prayer the church stands confronted with what is perhaps its greatest opportunity and its greatest responsibil-

ity since the era of modern missions began.

I. The evangelization of China is immensely important for the world's sake, and for its own sake as a member of the family of nations. Sir Robert Hart, who knows China in a political way better than any other living man, expresses the opinion that the only two possible things to prevent China's becoming a curse to herself and a menace to mankind are its partition, which he thinks is impossible without a devastating European war as one result of it, or its Christianization, which he rightly thinks is hopeless without a vastly greater expenditure of energy and means than are now being employed in that work. After ages of successful effort to defy the law of change and maintain the *status quo* of the times of Abraham and the Pharaoh's, the time has come at last for the civilization of the West to suplpant the old, effete, and dying civilization of China. The present Emperor, and many of the greatest men in China, are in favor of this change. Their effort to introduce it was temporarily defeated by the repre-

sentatives of the old order, but the methods of those who defeated them brought them into collision with the powers of the West, by whom they were in turn defeated, and now it is as certain as anything human can be that the old order must change and give place to the new. In another quarter of a century China, supplied with railroads, schools, factories, trained armies, and a revolutionized government, will be hurrying after Japan on the paths of modern progress.

There are those who say, "If this be so, why not let the evangelization of China wait until civilization has gone ahead and prepared the way for it?" A little mental philosophy and a little history are all one needs to know to answer that suggestion. The mental philosophy of the case is that the human mind, like nature, abhors a vacuum. No doubt our Western education will soon expel from the minds of the Chinese the nature superstitions which are the basis of their present religions, and the scream of the railroad whistle will frighten away many of the demons of earth and air that have terrorized them. As soon as this is done

the place which these things have occupied in their minds will be taken up by something else. And if the true religion is not there to take the place of them, that which will do so will be educated materialism and atheism. The history of the case is that this is what has occurred to a large degree in India and Japan. And we have learned in these countries that educated atheism is a much more difficult foe for Christian missions to deal with than uneducated Buddhism and Brahmanism. Moreover, we may well remember that our civilization, Christian though we call it, is not altogether so. It has its vices as well as its virtues, and the things which the heathen have affinity for and first lay hold on when they come into contact with it, as rerpesented by the trader and soldier, are its vices rather than its virtues. And so, whether our Wetsern civilization in the long run, will do China more harm than good, depends on whether we shall succeed in giving her along with it our Christian religion, which is the basis of all that is good in our civilization, and the only thing that

can make any nation truly civilized and great.

II. But the chief importance of evangelizing China arises out of certain facts in regard to her position, and certain characteristics of her people, which would make a converted China the greatest of all instruments for the evangelization of the rest of the Eastern world.

1. In respect of natural resources, excepting the United States of America, China is the greatest country in the world. Lying in the north temperate zone, where all the strong races of the earth are found, the church in China will possess more native energy and vigor than those established among the enervated people of the tropics. Its deposits of coal, iron, and all the precious metals, as yet untouched and undeveloped, are ample for the needs of the civilization that is to be. In the north and in the south much of the soil is poor and dry, and for the people of these sections life will, perhaps, always be as it is now, simply a struggle for existence. But in Central China, between the Yangtse and Hoang

rivers, lies the great plain, averaging from 150 to 200 miles in breadth, and running back several hundred miles in the interior. This is the largest and most fertile body of valley land to be found in one body anywhere in the world. The method of cultivation employed is very primitive but very effective. The old wooden plow that is still in use to stir the surface is a fac simile of the one that Noah made the day after he came out of the ark. The sub-soil is dug deep with the same old pick, of which pictures are found on the most ancient Egyptian monuments. The clods are carefully pulverized by the fingers of the people. Every evening at sunset during the crop season the fields are full of women and children, each with a gourd of liuid fertilizer and a small gourd with which they apply it to each separate and individual plant. In this way the quality of the soil has not only been preserved unimpaired, but has been improved from age to age, until it has now reached an almost incredible degree of fertility. And so, although that region is perhaps more densely populated

than any other part of the earth's surface, the farming people of the Yangtse Valley are able to get for themselves and their families three square meals a day, of rice and beans and vegetables, seasoned with fish from the canals, and to which are added roast pig or duck, and sundry sweet meats on feast days. They are a well-fed and well-to-do people as compared with the peasantry of some of the older countries in Europe. The church established in this part of China will have no need to be a pensioner on the bounty of Christendom. It will not only be able to be self-supporting and self-propagating, but will possess material resources enough to make it able to be an aggressive power for the evangelization of the rest of the Eastern world.

2. Next to the white Caucasian race, who are always and everywhere God's kings of men, the opinion of those who know them best is that the Chinese are, in respect to their capacities, the greatest people in the world. Physically, they are far superior to any other people of the Orient. The Canton coolie, whom

we know in this country as our laundryman, is far from being a representative specimen of his race. Many of these we see in the Yangtse Valley are six feet tall, strong and stalwart in their development, and possesses unequaled capacities of physical endurance.

The Chinaman, as we know him today, possesses some very unlovely traits of character. One does not know whether to be more offended or amused at his monumental and preposterous conceit. He is devoid of sentiment, cold, materialistic, and utilitarian in his view of life. When his passions are aroused he has a tiger-like ferocity and cruelty. In ordinary conversation he will tell you the truth only when he thinks he will deceive you by so doing. Some one asked a Chinese scholar for his estimate as to how many Chinamen out of every hundred would lie. His answer was, "one hundred and one." They were thought to hold the world's record in that line until, during the late troubles, the representatives of the Western Associated Press, at Shanghai, achieved a reputation for mendacity which, perhaps,

may require a revision of the world's judgment on the matter.

It has been shown, however, that some of these traits are not innate and ineradicable, but are a product of their environment, which may be changed when the environment is changed. Lieing, for instance, is characteristic of almost all the people who live under despotic governments, being the natural refuge of the weak from the oppression of the strong. The Chinaman possesses, naturally, some fine traits, which furnish a basis upon which, under the regenerating and sanctifying power of the gospel, a noble character may be built. His intellectual capacity may be gauged by the fact that for ages it is he who has given his civilization, literature, philosophy, and religion to the people of all the surrounding nations. He is sober-minded, industrious, inclined to be peaceable, and has an invincible respect for authority and law. The world furnishes no parallel to his patience and perseverance in carrying out any enterprise which he undertakes. In 1873 Gen. Tsotsung Chang was commissioned to

proceed from Pekin to the far South to suppress an army of brigands and pirates who were ravaging that section. It took him about three years to accomplish the journey with his army. Several times it was found necessary to turn his army into an agricultural colony and to plant and raise crops for its necessary supplies. The obstacles in his way were deemed by many to be insuperable, but he never once hesitated or halted in his efforts until at the end of nine years he was able to report to the emperor that his mission was thoroughly accomplished. When a Chinese student sets out to gain a literary degree as his qualification for public office, he makes a lifetime business of it until he succeeds. In 1899 the governor of one province reported at the competitive examination nine candidates over eighty years of age, and two over ninety. The governor of another province reported thirteen candidates over eighty, and one over ninety. A third governor reported thirty-five candidates over eighty, and eighteen over ninety. Unfetter such people from the bonds of ignorant superstition and give them the

problems of real science and truth to work at, and it staggers us to think what results in the way of scholarship would be achieved. Make such a people Christian, and they will make Christian thought dominant in the far East, as they have done heretofore with their Confucianism in their ancestral worship.

Another distinguishing characteristic of the Chinese among the Eastern peoples is what we may call their Calvinistic temperament. "The decrees of heaven" and "the will of heaven" are among the most frequent phrases in their literature and in their speech. As the word "heaven" now represents to them a blind, invisible power, or a host of malignant spirits, the result is that they are a nation of fatalists and pessimists. But if what they understand by heaven were supplanted by what the Bible reveals of the true God and our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ, their natural transformation would be into a nation of Pauline optimists and predestinarians. When we remember the part played in Christian history in the West by those holding this form of the faith, what may we not ex-

pect to be done in the East by the great and populous nation of China, Christianized and possessing the natural characteristics which insure that her Christianity will possess the same robust, sturdy and aggressive traits as that of the followers of Augustine, Calvin, and Knox?

Perhaps the greatest of the Chinaman's qualities is his well-known reliability in all matters which he recognizes as involving a responsibility or a trust. This quality seems inconsistent with some of the other qualities I have mentioned. But it is a fact abundantly proven by the best of evidence that he possesses it in a remarkable degree. A gentleman who spent twenty-five years in the Chinese silk trade recently testified through one of our periodicals that in ordering his goods from a Chinese merchant he found it unnecessary to employ any middleman at all. He had only to order his goods by correspondence, and he always found them on delivery to correspond exactly with the quality as represented by the Chinese merchant. In the foreign business houses in the coast cities of Japan, as well as those of China,

you will find that the employees in positions of trust are usually Chinese, and we are told that the betrayal of a trust by one of these employees is almost an unheardof occurrence. This quality grows, as I believe, partly out of their Calvinistic temperament, and partly out of their industrial system through the influence of heredity. Every trade and profession has its guild, and no one can pursue any calling or business without being a member of the guild which represents it. Even a street beggar must belong to the "beggars' guild," and in order to steal with impunity one must belong to the "thieves' guild." The guild holds its members responsible for its business reputation. If a member of any guild brings discredit on the organization by betraying his trust and thereby injures the guild's business, he is always severely disciplined, sometimes to the extent of being knocked on the head and thrown into a canal. And so at first through fear of the consequences, and finally through the influence of heredity, it has become a part of the Chinaman's nature to feel that he *must* be faithful

to a trust. This guild feature enters into their idea of the Christian church, and perhaps there is no other church in Christendom in which the sense of the responsibility of church membership is so strongly developed as it is among the one hundred thousand members of the various Protestant churches in China. During the last twelve months their fidelity to that responsibility has been put to its final and supreme test. And how have they stood the test? Even the secular papers have borne witness of the heroic fortitude with which they have endured persecutions as savage as those which the early Christians suffered at the hands of Nero and Caligula. The outrages of the Boxers did not extend to the territory occupied by our Southern Presbyterian missions, but the fear of these outrages was constantly before them, and the ordinary persecutions to which they are always subjected were much intensified. Our missionaries tell us that, so far as they know, under these persecutions not a single communing member of their churches denied the faith. In the provinces of Chili and

Shantung the native Christians stood up by the thousands to be tempted and sawn asunder and slain with the sword, when all they had to do to be left in peace was to betray their church and deny their Lord and Saviour. A nobler fidelity and a finer heroism than theirs is not to be found in the records of church history. What does this mean for the future of the church in China? It means that we have there a church which can be trusted to meet all the issues of the future, however trying they may be, as it has so nobly met those of the recent past. It means what it has always meant since our Saviour said, "Except a corn of wheat fall into the ground and die, it abideth alone; but if it die it bringeth forth much fruit." If the blood of the martyrs is the seed of the church, then from so great a sowing as the blood of ten thousand martyrs we may expect that God will give us a great reaping. And as it was the church of the early martyrs which carried the gospel to every part of the world that was then known to them, so we may expect that

this martyr church in China will prove a mighty evangelistic power in all the countries of the far East. And from that church, so filled with the spirit of the old heroic days, perhaps there will come back to us the influences that we need to bring again to this country and to Christian Europe that revival of primitive Christianity for which we pray, and without which we shall not see the glory of the latter days.

Finally, the Chinese are a colonizing people, with the spirit of enterprise and adventure that carries them everywhere that they can find an open door for the bettering of their condition. The most stringent exclusion laws, and sometimes the most cruel and unjust treatment, have not availed to keep multiplied thousands of them from entering this country. There are swarms of them in Japan, and Korea, and Formosa, and the Phillippines, and Java, and Sumatra, and Australia, and all the Pacific Islands. Wherever there is work and wages and they can find an entrance they go. This colonizing spirit ensures that the church

in China will be a missionary church, as that of the colonizing Anglo-Saxon has been. With a physical constitution adapted to all climates and defiant of all hardships, when the millions of China receive the gospel they will fill the Eastern world with missionaries bearing witness of the Christ who has brought them out of their bondage of corruption and superstition and fear into the liberty of the glory of the children of God. I do not advocate the idea that our church should do less than it is doing in any other field in order to do more for the evangelization of China. Our command is to "Go teach all nations," and the day will come when, both as individuals and as a church, we must answer to Christ for our obedience to that command. But, taking all things into consideration, it does seem to me that the evangelization of China is the greatest work that yet remains to be done in this world till Christ shall come again. Happy are they whom God shall call to a personal participation in that work. Only less happy are they who,

being deprived of the privilege of giving to it their personal service, are willing to give their time, their influence, their prayers and their means for its encouragement and support.

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